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Caroline Waldegrave's picturesque home in Chewton Mendip that doubles as a cookery school; Caroline in the kitchen, main image right

My aim is to make cooking enjoyable, – to cook in a way that is fun

Caroline Waldegrave was awarded an OBE for her achievements in running Leiths School of Food and Wine. However, she yearned to be teaching cookery – and soon she will be doing that in a new venture at her Somerset home. **Suzanne Savill** pays a visit. Pictures by **Fran Stothard**



Anyone who knows about food knows that Leiths School of Food and Wine is the place to learn how to cook.

And anyone who knows about this legendary London-based culinary institution knows that while the sign above the door is a reference to the name of its founder, Pru Leith, the success of the business also owes much to Caroline Waldegrave.

She had been head cook at Pru Leith's party catering company and was appointed principal of the newly opened Leiths School of Food and Wine in 1975 when she was just 23 and, as Pru has famously observed, "looked no older than the students". She went on to become managing director, and then in 1994 jointly bought the school with Sir Christopher Bland, the former chairman of British Telecom.

While Caroline was spending her working days surrounded by stu-

dents in aprons with "Leiths" emblazoned across them, and co-writing such works as *Leiths Cookery Bible*, she was also supporting the political career of her husband, the Conservative MP William Waldegrave – now Baron Waldegrave of North Hill, after becoming a life peer – as well as bringing up their four children.

So when Caroline – or, to use her correct title, Baroness Waldegrave of North Hill – delves into a neatly folded pile of kitchen whites and begins to unfurl one of the aprons that will be worn by students at the new cookery school she is opening at her family home in Somerset, the wording on the front is something of a surprise.

The green embroidery does not spell out the name "Waldegrave", as some might expect. Instead, there is an image of a tree and the word "Dudwell".



From the top, Caroline in her cookery school dining area; the exterior; and playing snooker. Students will also be able to indulge in other activities such as tennis, croquet or swimming

In keeping with the lack of ego that meant Caroline remained largely in the background while playing a key managerial role at Leiths, she has not seized the chance finally to have a business bearing her own name. Instead, she has called her new venture Dudwell School.

Didn't she want to take the opportunity to see her own name above the door – or at least on the aprons – now that she has set up her own cookery school?

"I much prefer Dudwell as it's the name of the house and I love it," says Caroline, a Cordon Bleu-trained cook, who will begin teaching her first intake of students in August.

Then she adds with a smile: "I hope that I'm going to establish Dudwell as a name."

It is an aim that she will surely achieve, judging by the experience of a quick tour of Dudwell School – which has been set up in previously derelict barns at Caroline's family home, Dudwell Field Farm, on the outskirts of the village of Chewton Mendip, which is part of the Waldegrave Estate that was given to Sir Edward Waldegrave in 1553 by Queen Mary I.

It is a very different scale of operations to Leiths, where 96 students can be taught in four rooms. Caroline will be providing personal tuition to just eight students at a time in the spacious white-tiled kitchen with stainless steel work units in the former barn, beside which is a light-filled garden room with a huge dining table, and bedrooms above.

"I so love teaching cooking and getting to know people and having fun, but I had to stop teaching to concentrate on the management side of things at Leiths," says Caroline,

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The number of students each of Caroline's cookery courses is open to

who was awarded an OBE in 2000 for services to the catering industry.

"My whole aim in starting up Dudwell School is to make cooking enjoyable. I want to show people how to cook in a way that is fun.

"Everyone will be able to take home their own book of recipes from the course. All the recipes are ones I think are essential. If you can master them you should be able to feel confident in the kitchen."

As well as enjoying themselves while learning in the kitchen, those who enrol upon Caroline's five-day courses – aimed primarily at those with little cookery experience – will also be able to spend the afternoons playing tennis, croquet, badminton, and bridge, or swimming in the pool beside the cookery school, or even playing snooker on a full-size table which was bought because Caroline is a keen player.

"I love snooker," she declares, as she leans over a cue and takes aim at a ball. She is wearing blue denim jeans and white trainers, and could easily pass for a decade or two younger than her 60 years.

How has she stayed so slim, after spending her career surrounded by food?

"I do a lot of exercise," she replies. "I think it's important to make some time for yourself."

Frankly, it is hard to work out how Caroline has time to manage to do even a few sit-ups.

She is still on the board at Leiths



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even though she is no longer a shareholder, after selling her shares in 2010, following the appointment in 2009 of her husband William as provost of Eton College, a role in which he is head of the governing body of the school which he once attended.

Caroline teaches cookery to the boys at Eton College, and also works as a psychotherapist. Other involvements are her family's organic farm, and also a freehold pub called The Barley Mow, just off Baker Street in central London, which the family bought last year.

"It dates back to 1791, and has tiny cubicles that were used for pawn-broking. It sells simple pub food, and our three youngest are living above it," says Caroline, whose children are Katie, 32, who is married; Liza, 29; Jamie, 28; and Harriet, 26.

She goes on to explain that Dudwell School will only be running for seven weeks a year, in summer, winter and Easter, as that is all she asked for when applying for planning permission to convert the barns, which were already in a derelict state 24 years ago when Caroline and William bought Dudwell Field Farm from William's elder brother James, the 13th Earl Waldegrave.

Amid rows of school photos and family photos covering the walls of the flagstone-floored entrance hall of Dudwell Field Farm are some aerial photographs of the farm back in the mid-Seventies, with huge functional metal barns alongside and dilapidated stone barns behind them.

"When we moved in 24 years ago, our main concern was getting work done on the house, so although we got those barns demolished we never got round to restoring the original stone barns," says Caroline.

"I had it in the back of my head for a while that I wanted to set up a cookery school in the barns. But it has taken a long time to do it, as even since I decided to go ahead with the work it has required detailed planning permission and extensive building work, including underpinning."

"I love a project, and setting up Dudwell School has been a huge one. I'm so pleased to see it all coming together at last."

For information on cookery courses at Dudwell School email bookings@dudwellschool.com, call 07860 123 827 or go to www.dudwellschool.com

'Everyone will be able to take home their own book of recipes from the course. If you can master them you should be able to feel confident in the kitchen'

From debt collector to winning chef – meet baker boy Edd

Helen Blow talks to Edd Kimber, the winner of the first Great British Bake Off, following his appearance at Cheltenham's Food and Drink Festival

Baker Edd Kimber certainly knows how to inspire greatness in the kitchen.

After chatting to him, I had a go at making his celebrated salted caramel brownies.

Although I found it trickier than my normal brownie recipe, the finished result was so delicious that it made all the work worth it.

Since winning the first *Great British Bake Off* three years ago, Edd's life has changed beyond recognition and he has joined the echelons of celebrity British chefs.

It does help that almost everyone loves cake and biscuits and his recipes are to die for. A glance through his website reveals a line-up of treats that wouldn't look out of place in Willy Wonka's factory. Berry ice pops, strawberry rhubarb lemonade, cinnamon rolls and pistachio and rose gelato; it's enough to get you dusting off the three-tiered cake stand and turning the Aga to high.



Edd Kimber, who was inspired by the baking of his mother and grandmother, was the first Bake Off winner

Since impressing Paul Hollywood and Mary Berry with his baking skills, Edd's career in the kitchen has taken off dramatically.

Hard to believe then that, as a young man fresh out of school, he was turned down by his local catering college for a place on its course.

"I have baked since I was a child when we used to do it to occupy ourselves," said Edd, 27.

Thankfully, he wasn't put off by this initial rejection and decided to teach himself instead.

"As a child my mum and grandmother were great bakers and used to bake as part of their daily chores.

"At first I only did it now and again as a hobby but when I was working I started doing it as a bit of a relief from the daily job and it became a bit of an obsession."

His first job as a debt collector for a bank was about as different as you can get from baking and Edd admits he loathed it.

"It was the best day ever when I handed in my notice. There was no way I was staying there after I won the *Great British Bake Off*."

Now much of his time when he's not baking is spent talking or writing about baking. His website has a blog and lots of recipes for people to try out. He appears regularly on television, has a couple of cookbooks to his name and shares his talent and tips with people in food roadshows and events.

And when he finally gets to relax he still finds himself reaching for his apron and wooden spoon.

"My favourite things to make when I want to relax are chocolate chip cookies. You just can't beat them," he said.